A Greek Tragedy:
Higher Education Reform in Greece?

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1. The Scene


Temperatures rising. Temperaments rising. The riots in France several weeks earlier have given inspiration to the protestors – and not only for the slogan: “It will become…..a France here”\(^1\). But there is no need for inspiration; no need for imitation; no need for “a France here” as Greece’s university community has mastered the skill - perfected it to art-form!

*Greek universities are at a standstill as lecturers and students protest against a government plan to revise the constitution and end the state monopoly in university education. They also oppose abolition of the university sanctuary and the strict period of studies. Students blocked reform attempts in 1991, 1992, 1995, 1998 and 2002.*

- Times Higher Education Supplement\(^2\)

Mid-June the Minister withdraws the higher education bill promising to present it to Parliament in October\(^3\). But this does not pacify the protestors. University lock-outs continue and….increase. Protests intensify. Angry voices demand the higher education bill *never* to be presented to Parliament….and even angrier voices demand the immediate resignation of the Minister.

“I am protesting so that the [higher education] bill does not get passed [by parliament]. For me the most important thing that must be avoided is the privatization of universities”.

- Daphni Tsiouni, university student\(^4\)

June 20: Not optimistic that the riots will subside by the end of the month when the meeting of the OECD Education Committee on Higher Education is scheduled to take place in the center of Athens, at a venue located at the heart of the most aggressive

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\(^1\) Translation of the Greek: «Θα γίνει της Γαλλίας εδώ».

\(^2\) June 16, 2006

\(^3\) And not during the summer as was the original intention.

\(^4\) *Proto Thema* Sunday newspaper, June 18, 2006
riots, the Ministry of Education changes the venue to a location 40 kilometers from the city of Athens. Delegates are notified:

Dear Colleagues,

You are registered to attend the meeting of the OECD Education Committee on Higher Education: Quality, Equity and Efficiency which will take place in Greece from 27 and 28 June 2006.

For reasons of high security and to ensure the comfort and tranquility of delegates away from the possibility of student demonstrations, the Greek authorities have informed us that they have changed the venue of the meeting from Athens to a resort some 40 kilometers from Athens by the sea.

- Excerpt of e-mail sent by OECD Education Committee Secretariat

An otherwise idyllic location for a meeting of Ministers to discuss, to contemplate the issues on the agenda: Quality, Equity and Efficiency of Higher Education in OECD countries. Outside, a small but boisterous group of students make their way past the police blockades; raise their placards and their voices for the world to see, to hear.

At the same time when the Secretary General of the OECD, Angel Gurria, was announcing that the model by which Higher Education is funded exclusively by the state is inappropriate, about 500 [university students] clash with Special Police Forces demanding free education.

-TA NEA newspaper

Quality, Equity and Efficiency? Ironic under the circumstances!

Friday, June 30: The last of the protests – for now. Protestors warn: “We’ll be back in September!” Refreshed, energized ready to resume – protests, lock-outs, clashes with police, demands. At least the authorities don’t have the element of surprise to contend with.

July, August: Two months to be – to allow the situation to work itself out - or not to be - to plan, to strategize, to prepare for what lies ahead?

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5 From Sue.Lindsay@oecd.org to frances@hol.gr June 20, 2006.
6 June 28, 2006.
2. The Setting

All social movements involve conflicts which are reflected intellectually in controversies. It would not be a sign of health if such an important social interest as education were not also an arena of struggles, practical and theoretical.....the practical conflicts and the controversies that are conducted upon the level of these conflicts, only set a problem. It is the business of an intelligent theory of education to ascertain the causes for the conflicts that exist and then, instead of taking one side or the other, to indicate a plan of operations proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the practices and ideas of the contending parties.

- John Dewey (1963:5)

If we attempt to explain the scene described above\(^7\) in terms of cause and effect as recommended by Dewey (1963) we would conclude that the proposed higher education bill\(^8\) (that the Government planned to present to Parliament in July), coupled with the proposed changes to the Constitution\(^9\) so as to allow the operation of private universities in Greece, created sufficient dissatisfaction amongst interested parties and stakeholders, to warrant the protests that intensified in June and are due to resume in September. Furthermore, we might even conclude that each of the proposed changes\(^10\) - separately and alone - would have produced the same results since not all protestors were rallying against changes to both the higher education bill \(\text{and}\) to the Constitution: some protestors were rallying against proposed changes to the higher education bill; some protestors were rallying against proposed changes to the Constitution to allow for privatization of higher education; and some protestors were rallying against both proposed changes\(^11\).

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\(^7\) See Section 1: The Scene

\(^8\) The key changes proposed creating conflict were: limitation of duration of university studies; the university ‘asylum’; accreditation; election of the university governing board.

\(^9\) Article 16 of the Constitution prohibits the establishment of private universities in Greece. However, it should be noted that the two issues – that is, the higher education reform bill and the proposed changes to Article 16 of the Constitution - are unrelated. That is, one is independent of the other.

\(^10\) That is, to the higher education bill and to the Constitution.

\(^11\) Evidenced by newspaper articles and reports during the period from January 2006 to July 2006.
The question however is, to what extent are the protests (*effect*) independent of the proposed changes (*cause*)? Dewey (1963:5) recommends “proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive than is represented by the practices and ideas of thecontending parties”. It is precisely this level that must not - and can not - be overlooked in the case of Greece if not only reforms to higher education, but any changes whatsoever to the existing status quo, are to have a chance of survival.

This *deeper level* then, is, I propose, the level of culture and of tradition. With regard to the protests described above\(^{12}\), over the years I have come to realize that in Greece, it is not always what one is protesting about that is important but rather, the protest itself. It seems that there is some deeply rooted trigger in Greeks that once a political authority\(^{13}\) announces, or even hints at in some cases, some reform measure or change especially with regard to higher education, this sets off a negative reaction resulting in protests and demonstrations - sometimes peaceful but more often than not, violent - with special police forces being called in by the Government to contain the riots, which in turn and without fail, triggers more negative reaction by protestors. It has become a predictable vicious circle. In fact, this *action-reaction* or *cause-effect* to change (especially in higher education) has become a ‘tradition’\(^{14}\). Mandravelis (2006) appropriately notes in the Sunday newspaper *Kathimerini*\(^{15}\) that not only can the handling of protestors by police be considered as ‘traditional’ but more importantly:

\(^{12}\) See Section 1: The Scene

\(^{13}\) In particular, the Government.

\(^{14}\) Tradition is here defined as information manifested in acts or practices brought into the present from the past, in a particular societal context, and repeated over a long sequence of time. Such acts or practices, once performed, generally disappear unless they have been transformed into some manner of communicable information.

\(^{15}\) *Opinions*, August 20, 2006
The protest problem which afflicts Athens nine-hundred times every eighteen months, is a characteristic sample of the hang-ups which the post-dictatorship left on the country. Protests are a form of expression that was forbidden by the dictatorship and is being exercised with excess during times of Democracy. However, over time, protests have taken on characteristics of “hard tradition” (Mandravelis, 2006).

Although Mandravelis (2006) may be exaggerating when he quantifies protests in Athens as “nine-hundred times every eighteen months”, it surely must feel this way to shop-owners in the city centre where protestors congregate, whose profits drop between 51-75% on each day of protest, representing over 40 billion euro profit loss collectively each year, according to the National Association of Greek Commerce.

Mandravelis (2006) does however, rightly put the pulse on the situation. His reference to the “hang ups which the post-dictatorship left” are not only significant in understanding the ‘tradition’ of protests or ‘protesting’ in Greece and of police reaction to protestors, but more importantly, in understanding the cultural context within which any successful change agent is to achieve envisaged goals and objectives.

Ethical, political, and social problems do not occur in isolation but take place as conflicts in cultural contexts.

- Verne (1970:278)

In Logic: The Theory of Inquiry, Dewey (1938, cited by Verne 1970) notes that the cultural environment influences to a very large extent the ways in which human

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16 Here, the word “hard” is a direct translation. However, in this context the connotation of ‘hard’ is more precisely translated as: not so pleasant, aggressive.
17 Kathimerini newspaper, Επιχειρήσεις. August 20, 2006, p. 7
18 Although the tradition of protests or protesting in Greece is a topic of special interest and concern warranting further investigation, such investigation is beyond the scope of this paper. The reference to ‘police reaction’ here has been to show how certain practices imprint upon a culture to become classed as ‘tradition’. Police reaction to protestors has been an area of contention in Greece since the November 17 student uprisings of 1974 against the dictatorship, when university students were killed or injured by police and army forces storming the National Polytechnic University of Athens. Police brutality has been associated with right-wing political contexts and although the present rightist government of the New Democracy party, has not dealt with the protests any differently than the previous government of the socialist party, PASOK, did for 20 years that it governed, there seems to be a negative public association between the ruling New Democracy party and police forces controlling protests, riots, demonstrations.
beings respond to physical conditions. “[W]hat man does and how he acts is determined not by organic structure and physical heredity alone but by the influence of cultural heredity, embedded in traditions, institutions, customs, and the purposes and beliefs they both carry and inspire” (p.217). Karl Jaspers goes one step further when he talks of historical assimilation. “What is over and done with”, he says, “nevertheless persists as a cultural element devoid of content. The panorama of the millenniums is like a region of beatific contemplation” (cited in Verne 1970, p. 254).

Much has been written about Greece and the Greeks. There are travel writings, guidebooks, literature, governmental reports, and academic papers (eg historical accounts and sociological discussions). A representative sample includes: Allison and Nicolaïdis (1997); Ascherson (1996); Broome (1996); Close (1995); Danforth (1995); Doumanis (1983); Dubisch (1986); Durrell (1978); Fermor (1958/1984; 1966/1983); Fiada (1994); Friedl (1962); Gage (1987); Glenny (1999); Greenhalgh and Eliopoulis (1985); Hadbegger et al. (2000); Hiestand (1992); Hirschon (1989/1998); Holden (1972); Kain Hart (1992); Kaplan (1993); Kazantzakis (1965); Keeley (1999); Kizilos (1997); Mackridge and Yannakakis (1997); Mazower (2000); OECD (1995); Papandreou (1996); Pettifer (1993); Poulton (1991; 1995); Powell (1957/1999); Rawlins (1997); Salmon (1995); Sanders (1962); Simpson (1968); Tannen (1982); Todorova (1997); and Triandis (1972). A common theme that always arises however is the paradoxical nature of Greece and Greeks. One writer describes this paradoxical nature as:

… a maddening mobile, elusive, paradoxical world, where nothing seems solid enough to grasp save splinters, yet where no part is less than the mystical whole and where past and present, body and soul, ideal and reality blend and struggle and blend again with each other so that the most delicate scalpel can scarcely dissect them (Holden 1972: p.34).
Hadbegger et al. (2000), explain this paradox as the contrast between the burden that Greece must carry due to “the weighty baggage of much ancient honour past” (p.xiv), and the challenges it must attend to as a modern country. This historical paradox has been described by Glenny (1999) as “the schizophrenia of the Greek heritage: oriental and Byzantine on the one hand; occidental and romantic-revolutionary on the other” (p. 32). Still others believe that this paradox or schizophrenia is an innate feature of the Greek character. “The character of the Greeks, even at the time of Homer, could best be described as schizophrenic” writes Faida (1994:12).

Whatever the case may be, the propensity towards tensions that affect Greeks is a reality:

..... Greek identity as a whole [is] best seen as a constant oscillation between just such opposites as these ... the spirit and the flesh, ideal and reality, triumph and despair, - you name them and the Greeks suffer or enjoy them as the constant poles of their being, swinging repeatedly from one to the other and back again, often contriving to embrace both poles simultaneously, but above all, never reconciled, never contented, never still. This perennial sense of tension between diametrically opposed forces is the essence of their existence - the one absolutely consistent feature of their identity since Greek history began ... (Holden, 1972: 27-28).

Such tensions however, do not always carry the negative connotations outsiders attribute to them. For Greeks, they are a “way of life” (Broome 1994:114). Kazantzakis’ Zorba the Greek19 is probably the best exemplification of this paradoxical nature of the Greeks. Although Zorba shows a supreme appreciation for the richness of life and the inevitability of all its dilemmas, sorrows, tragedies, and ironies, his way is to "dance" in the gale of the full catastrophe, to celebrate life, to laugh with it and at himself even in the face of personal failure and defeat. In doing so, he is never weighed down for long, never ultimately defeated either by the world or by his own considerable folly. Perhaps this is why it is very easy for a Greek to be

swept away by his own rhetoric, by his wild exaggerations, by sweeping generalizations that can easily mislead the unsuspecting. There may be some truth in what Faida (1994) says:

...there are visitors who leave Greece firmly believing that the Greeks still worship the twelve Olympian gods (p.39).

However, although Greeks like to hear themselves speak, they have yet to master the skill of ‘listening’ – the most essential requirement for carrying out a dialogue. Observing Greeks having a dialogue is like watching a battle – a battle of personal opinions being shot out in the air – where all are survivors, all are victors since the end is neither to reach the truth nor to reach a conclusion; its end is as Broome (1996) notes: “the sheer enjoyment of vigorous speech” (p.71). Plato may have lifted his favourite instrument, the dialogue, to its highest splendour, but it seems that modern Greeks prefer the rhetorical style of the Sophist.20

The notion of Greeks therefore, of undertaking or participating in a “dialogue” – a public dialogue at that – to debate or discuss proposed changes to higher education as hoped for by the Minister of Education, Marietta Giannakou, is not only nonsensical, but ludicrous. The inability of Greeks to grasp the notion of “dialogue”, let alone to structure a “public dialogue” in order to achieve the democratic results hoped for by the Government through such a process, is distinctively important in understanding the finer, more subtle reasons behind the protests described above21. Not even the leader of the opposition party PASOK, George Papandreou, is capable of putting into practice the art of dialogue although paradoxically he maintains that the ‘new’ PASOK is built on the principles of ‘participatory government’ and ‘participatory...
democracy”. Not only are the members of his party that disagree with him and the ‘party line’ exorcized from his party, but the PASOK representatives refused to participate in the intergovernmental committee for education set up by the Government and started their own public dialogue campaign on higher education.

On January 21, 2005, the Minister of Education, Marietta Giannakou, launched the “National Dialogue for Education”, in order to “shape an all-inclusive national strategy for Education”. Six months later the representatives of the opposition party PASOK refuse to participate in this dialogue and a year later the opposition party PASOK launches its own dialogue platform for higher education reforms. A year and a half later, in June 2006, there are violent protests by students, faculty, parents and other stakeholders across Greece – all demanding “dialogue” on the proposed higher education reforms: some demanding “dialogue” because they believe “there was no dialogue”; and others demanding “a broader dialogue …to start from zero” so that “agreement can be reached”!

Why is it that the “dialogue” and the process of such “dialogue” has not only become an issue of contention in the higher education reform process, but to a large extent, has also taken centre-stage? Is it because there has been no “dialogue” or is it that the concepts, perceptions and understandings of “dialogue”, its process, what it

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22 See PASOK party web-site: http://www.pasok.gr/
23 One casualty was former Minister of National Economy and of Defence, Giannos Papantoniou who was expelled from the PASOK party by its leader, George Papandreou on August 8, 2006, for not following the party line (ALTER News television broadcast).
26 See: http://www.forum-paideia.gr/message2.php
28 To BHMA newspaper. Η Κρίση στην Παιδεία. July 9, 2006 (p. A37).
should comprise and what its outcomes should be, are beyond comprehension by Greeks? Is it that there are so many vested interests by the various stakeholders that reaching consensus is like a ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’? And if so, should this not be taken into consideration by those attempting change within an already sensitive area of reform, such as higher education?

The role of the press in heightening actions and reactions to government reforms can not be overlooked in Greece. Greeks may not read much of anything else, but at least skimming the front page of newspapers hanging from kiosks for easily browsing, is a cultural ‘tradition’ that is intricately bound to stirring sentiment, especially when it comes to such issues as student protests. “Greeks”, as Fiada (1994) so rightly points out, “easily catch the bug of fanaticism, which is fanned by the press to a degree unheard of in other countries” (p.57). Newspapers, and what is written or shown especially on the front page, constitute more than “the mental life of [the] day as the awareness of how things go with the masses” (Jaspers, cited in Verne, 1970:258). It is perhaps for this reason that reporters tend to gain unprecedented power when reporting on events that stir public opinion and sentiment (such as education and especially higher education); more often than not are on the pay-roll of political parties29; and very often move into politics themselves30. They are most definitely not “anonymous” as Jaspers (cited in Verne 1970:259) would have us believe. In Greece, the journalist does feel him/her self in “harmony with these powers” since:

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29 According to the journalist, Makis Triantafyllopoulos as revealed on his television talk-show “Kitrinos Typos”, December 14, 2006.
30 For example: the former Minister of Education, Mr. Petros Eythimiou; the current Government spokesperson, Theordoros Roussopoulos; the member of Parliament of the PASOK party, Sylvana Rapti; to name but very few.
Ideals usually play a very small part in choosing sides, although one will rarely hear a Greek admit it. Adherence to a particular party depends more on whether its leaders catches the public’s fancy, on his powers of persuasion and on the effectiveness of his propaganda network, than on his programme or his performance. The decisive factor is always the personal benefit one may expect once the party of one’s choice comes to power. (Fiada 1994:57-58)

The vested interests of Greeks individually rather than collectively, is a major hinderance to achieving consensus in order for change agents to accomplish their goals without having to be brought to the point of retreat by agressive opposition such as that displayed in June\(^{31}\). Again, however, this is an aspect of Greek culture, Greek tradition that must be taken into consideration when attempting change strategies.

Other people have bureaucracies, the Greeks have ‘connections’...in any given ministry or public service....These friends can speed things along, sometimes as a favour, other times for a kick-back commensurate with the importance of the service requested.... However, those who do not hold a key to the bureaucratic maze find things very different. This is because bureaucracy in Greece has been elevated to a form of art: the art of making enemies of the citizens. ...Getting entangled in Greek red tape makes Kafka’s Trial look like a pleasant walk in the park.....

- Faida, 1994 (pp. 58-59)

Nicolaidis in The Greek Paradox: The Promise vs Performance\(^{32}\), points out that even though democracy was restored over two decades ago and solid democratic institutions were put into place, the political system remains ineffective and plagued by clientelism (p.2). She notes that:

Despite the watershed victory of the Greek socialist party PASOK in the 1981 elections, the situation perversely worsened. To be sure, PASOK’s arrival at the pinnacle of power contributed decisively to the legitimization of Greek democracy through the integration into the system of whole strata of the population that formerly had been excluded. But this movement only served to intensify the paternalistic/particularist logic of the prior era under the euphemism of “compensatory justice,” and to increase the inefficiency and corruption of the state-controlled sector.” (p.5)

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\(^{31}\) See above: Section 1 – The Scene.

\(^{32}\) Allison and Nicolaidies (1997)
This may, to some extent, explain why education – and especially higher education – there is so much resistance to change within higher education eventhough there is public agreement about its shortcomings. The paradox however, is that despite all the shortcomings of the present education system, the concept of *paideia*\(^{33}\) remains as important to today’s Greeks as it was to their forefathers Plato and Aristotle\(^{34}\). Education is always at the forefront of Greek society – it is intricately bound to culture and tradition. Harvard University Professor, Bruce Fuller, speaking at the conference/workshop on “Greek Higher Education – Prospects for Reform”\(^{35}\) expresses is amazement at the figures evidencing this fact: “10.9 per 10,000 inhabitants was the enrolment rate in Greek education in the year 1892, and 2.7 per 10,000 inhabitants was the enrolment rate in the presumably more modern country of France in the year 1892”, he says, and goes on to characterize this situation as: “a robust social demand for education, one obviously rooted in its history and culture”. Even for example, in 1974, when crowds spontaneously demonstrated to celebrate the fall of the military junta, the triality demanded of the new regime was:

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Psomi! Paideia! Democratia!
(Bread! Education! Democracy!)
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Education however is considered a means to an end – that is, to get into university and attain a university degree. Family pressure is high; the demand for higher education is even higher\(^{36}\). Not surprisingly then, changes in any aspect of higher education result in insecurities that manifest themselves in a denial or fear of any change. One

\(^{33}\) That is, ‘education’.

\(^{34}\) As expressed in Plato’s *The Republic* and Aristotle’s *Politics*.

\(^{35}\) Harvard University, USA, May 22-23, 1996.

\(^{36}\) University enrolment in Greece grew from about 30,000 students in the early sixties to nearly 200,000 in the nineties - with approximately 40 percent of these students characterized as “dormant” (Lambropoulos, 1996)
reason for this is that more often than not, the existing system is used to engineer social mobility. As Close (1995:8-9) notes:

For peasants prepared to finance their children’s education, as many were, state employment offered a means of upward mobility for the family ... The emphasis of secondary and tertiary education on rote-learning gave an opportunity for success to children prepared to slave their way to a certificate which would earn them a white-collar job.

The gulf that exists between the rational/intellectual approach to human organization and the frequently irrational facts of human nature must be seriously taken into consideration. Parkinson (1957) reminds us that:

Aristotle may have been an academic but he was also a practical scientist, and in contrast to Plato, his ideas were based on a sound understanding of what people were really like and how they could be expected to behave under particular circumstances.” (p. 10)

It is this essence of culture and its effect on behaviour that Hall (1973) captures in the *The Silent Language*, in just one sentence: “Culture”, he says “controls behaviour in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside of awareness and therefore beyond conscious control of the individual” (p. 25). It is this ‘essence’ that change agents need to take heed of in order to better assess possible reactions to proposed actions.

3. The Tragedy

This essence of culture and its effect on behaviour is ultimately the *tragedy* of the Greek nature. Although Aristotle in *The Poetics* gives to the world ‘tragedy’, it is Nietzsche in his famous early book, *The Birth of Tragedy*, who introduces an intellectual dichotomy that characterizes Greek nature even today – that is, the
dichotomy between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Nietzsche claims life always involves a struggle between these two elements, each battling for control over the existence of man. For the Greeks, this seems to be intricately bound to their culture which in turn, has effected their behaviour. In Nietzsche's words:

> Wherever the Dionysian prevailed, the Apollonian was checked and destroyed ... wherever the first Dionysian onslaught was successfully withstood, the authority and majesty of the Delphic god Apollo exhibited itself as more rigid and menacing than ever.

- Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

It is perhaps this struggle, this dichotomy in Greek nature that ‘equalizes’ any attempt at change or reform. Noel McGinn (1996), Harvard Professor of Higher Education, speaking at a workshop on Greek higher education reforms notes that:

> Most of the current issues relating to higher education in Greece have been suffered for a number of years. Despite frequent complaints and a voluminous body of research, however no fundamental changes have been made in the root causes of these problems. Nor are changes likely without a shift of the social and political actors who determine the course and nature of higher education.

- Noel McGinn

Dimaras (1995) and Kazamias (1995) nicely put it when they each on separate occasions note: “The more Greeks talk about change, the more the system stays the same”. Unfortunately, reality does not contradict this otherwise, unequivocal generalization. A quick scan of some of the newspaper articles and reports in a cross-section of the press over the past 15 years shows that the same issues with regard to higher education – reforms necessary for public universities, whether or not private universities should be allowed to operate, and the need for a ‘public dialogue’ in order to have a consensus about change – have been addressed as areas of contention since

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37 Reality undifferentiated by forms and like distinctions as opposed to reality as differentiated by forms, or the forms themselves.
38 Since both sides, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, are of equal strength.
1990 with absolutely no progress whatsoever in terms of change or at least a step in any direction:

All newspapers during the two-year period 1990-1991 are plagued with articles and reports discussing the legality of private university/college operators in Greece and whether or note the Constitution should be changed to allow for the operation of private universities.

TA NEA newspaper, October 4, 1990
The then Minister of Education, Kontogiannopoulos, talks of the development of a new legal framework for the operation of universities that will give them autonomy of administration. Interestingly, the proposals put forth for reforms in higher education in 1990 are similar if not identical to the proposals put forth by the Ministry and the National Council for Education in 2006!

TO BHMA newspaper, December 2, 1990
The conclusion of the four-day conference about Higher Education is reported as: “Higher Education is clinically dead”. A proposal is put forth that: “This is a big opportunity for a real and fruitful public dialogue on Education.”

APOGEYMATINH newspaper, March 17, 1991
Even though the political platform of the New Democracy government elected to power a year ago, clearly states that private universities will be allowed, the new Minister of Education, George Souflias, decides that the discussion around private universities is a sore point and causing endless protests, and refuses any discussion on this topic. The legal restriction of the word “university” is enforced and those private operators that continue to call themselves “universities” are taken to court.

Times Higher Education Supplement, June 25, 1993
Greek university principals warn the government they will resign en mass unless it takes steps to solve the financial problems faced by their institutions.

TA NEA newspaper, November 7, 1994
The then Minister of Education, George Papandreou tries to address the: “Byzantinism and civil servant attitude of universities” by calling on the OECD for an evaluation of the Greek education system in order “to get an objective base for public dialogue of reforms necessary”.

TO BHMA newspaper, June 11, 1995
The then rector of the National Polytechnic University of Greece, Prof. Nikos Markatos, in his article entitled “Higher Education in Greece and the disadvantages of its privatization: Higher Education - A Social Benefit or Merchandise?” concludes that the solution is to be found in the upgrading and the quality provision of higher education, and in the improvement of it administrative organization”.

TO BHMA newspaper, October 8, 1995
The issue of private universities is brought to the forefront (again) and Greek law rebuked as being contrary to EU legislation since article 16, paragraph 5 of the Greek Constitution does not permit the establishment of private universities.


**APOGEYMATINH newspaper, April 4, 1996**

It is reported that the OECD in its evaluation of Greek higher education, recommends the establishment of private universities. This rekindles the discussion about whether or not private universities can be established in Greece and whether they should. It also brings about more protests and public unrest on the topic.

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**EXOUSIA newspaper, June 30, 1997**

The High Court of Greece give the 'green light' for the recognition of degrees awarded by the pseudo private universities operating in Greece, regardless of the restrictions placed by the Constitution.

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**TO BHMA newspaper, May 17, 1998**

In an article entitled “The University in between the “public” and the “private” notes that the discussion around the establishment or not of private universities “is one of the few points of disagreement in the open procedure for the changes in the Constitution”. Also noted is “the need for deep rooted reforms in higher education”.

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**TO BHMA newspaper, August 9, 2001**

The Ministry of Education announces that it will not recognize the degrees awarded by branches of foreign universities (through franchise and licensing agreements) operating in Greece, even though the European Commission has threatened to take Greece to the European Court.

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**KATHIMERINH newspaper, January 20, 2002**

Headlines: Universities in Decline – Without vision, goals and administration.

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**TO BHMA newspaper, January 13, 2004**

Government spokesperson, Protopapas (PASOK) notes: Papandreou has been outspoken about his views on the matter of non-state not-for-profit universities since 1996 when he was Minister of Education. He believes that non-government organizations should have the right to provide higher education studies and public university should decentralize, become independent and be closer to Greek society.

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**KATHIMERINI newspaper, August 29, 2004**

Manolis Drettakis (former Minister) questions whether the national dialogue for education reform that the Government has announced will be able to reach common agreement and implementable proposals to solve the many problems faced by Greek education system, since similar dialogues in the past have failed to bring about any results. He notes that a national policy needs to be developed that won’t change every time the government changes or even when Ministers of Education change.

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**TO BHMA newspaper, October 10, 2004**

The Minister of Education, Marietta Giannakou, notes that private universities are not allowed by the Constitution. Therefore, until the Constitution is changed there can not be any private universities.

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**HMERISIA newspaper, December 11-12, 2004**

Universities warn of all-out strike – one reason is the potential establishment of private universities. University professors believe that private universities will lead to the degrading and debasement of titles given by public universities.
KATHIMERINI newspaper, January 16, 2005
Article discusses the perennial problems of universities in Greece – absent faculty, not enough classrooms, over-registration of students in certain classes, not well prepared university entrants, no system/curriculum (for example, a student can take final exams for Physics III without having passed Physics II), no research, political party control.

ETHNOS newspaper, June 1, 2005
PASOK withdraws from participation in the National Dialogue for Education and has decided to undertake its own initiative for dialogue with all the stakeholders concerned with education in order to discuss with them the issues and find solutions and make proposals from the beginning.

TA NEA newspaper, August 22, 2005
The European Commission is threatening to take the Greek government to European Court over the issue of non-recognition of degrees awarded by European universities through collaborative ventures with Greek partner institutions. The Greek Government has objected since the Constitution does not allow private universities and therefore, it does not intend to recognize the titles awarded by the private colleges in Greece.

TO BHMA newspaper, September 25, 2005
A study reveals that approximately 18,000 students are registered at private Greek university/colleges with collaborations with foreign universities.

TO BHMA newspaper, December 25, 2005
The article entitled “The Legal Framework for the Universities is Cause for WAR” warns that the first draft of the proposed legal framework of universities presented by the Nation Council for Education will be the cause for protests that will climax in the coming summer (2006).

KOSMOS TO EPENDITI newspaper, December 30, 2005/January 1, 2006
The Government announces its intention to change Article 16 (par. 5, 6, 8) of the Constitution to allow the operation of non-state, not-for-profit universities.

KATHIMERINH newspaper, August 20, 2006
A report states that “there is neither a plan, nor a vision that would provide the bases for real reforms in education, which seem to be moving according to the logic of the 1960’s”.

All, without exception, stating and restating the same problems and the same issues troubling higher education in Greece. However, the inability of the actors to move from the level of stating them, to actually doing something about them, seems to be one of the tragic flaws of our scenario for change and reform.

Even George Papandreou, former Minister of Education and one of the protagonists in favour of system-wide reforms in education, who in 1995 commissioned the OECD to undertake an evaluation of the Greek education system in order to use the outcomes of this evaluation as the basis for public dialogue, was unable to move beyond the level of stating the problems to actually solving them. His description in fact, of the Greek education system in the Preface of the OECD Review (1996) as:

......extremely centralized and inflexible, bureaucratic and insensitive to the changes......in total isolation of the economic, social, and international realities, unable to respond to the needs of society, of youth......

is predictably similar to the description of the Greek education system presented in the OECD (1980, 1982) reports over 15 years earlier when apprehensions about the implementation of educational modernisation and democratisation in Greece is expressed as “arduous” - not only because these are difficult tasks to accomplish in any liberal society, but more so, because Greece is “a country with deeply entrenched traditions, very limited resources, conflicting ideologies and a history of educational conservatism, as well as frequent political changes.”

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40 Hellenic Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs.
41 For example, whether or not private universities should be allowed to operate.
42 That is, those in a position to solve the problems and deal with the issues which plague higher education.
43 And currently leader of the opposition party PASOK.
Papandreou also sought kudos for reforms in higher education through a workshop on “Greek Higher Education: Prospects for Reform” held at, and organized in collaboration with, Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, on May 22-23, 1996. Again, Papandreou, in his key-note address at the workshop, noted the age-old challenges facing the Greek education system:

“The first is how to get beyond the dilemmas of our past….For Greece, our educational system is bound up with this past. It has been obscured by a number of social political changes over the years....

“Another issue that has imposed a mental set on our thinking is our experience with regard to foreign intervention and the influence of new ideas coming from outside. Foreign intervention is alternately seen as the panacea for everything, or a reason for resisting everything foreign. It is in short a false dichotomy, a transfer of responsibility; either all that is “bad’ comes from the outside, or all that is “good” comes from outside.....we have a tradition of adopting education models from other countries....

“Of course, there is also the dilemma of Greece’s war heritage. Greece experienced a civil war that created a highly polarized political situation, which has in turn led to a very strong desire for central control on our education system and to a very centralized, rigid, bureaucratic and homogenized type of system; centralized in that most control lies in the minister’s office or the Ministry of Education, or other central bodies....Our political heritage is characterized by a tradition of “clientelism” – or what we call ‘rousfeti’ or clientelistic relationships between the politicians and the citizens.

“One of the major obstacles to the success of educational reform in Greece has been the discontinuity brought about because of political changes, including changes of Ministers of Education even within the same government.

Nevertheless, the groundwork for reforms that had been laid by Papandreou was in vain. Political changes in October 1996\textsuperscript{45} with new \textit{actors} in place ensured that any traces of the OECD Review, along with the preparations that had been made for widespread \textit{public dialogue} on reforms, were eliminated\textsuperscript{46}. This, of course, is another \textit{tragic flaw} of our scenario. In the last 15 years, there have been 7 different Ministers

\textsuperscript{45} After the death of Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou.
\textsuperscript{46} All copies of the OECD Review that had been translated in Greek for ease of reference by the Greek public, were put in storage at the Ministry of Education, and no reference made to continuing Papandreou’s effort by the new Minister of Education, Mr. Gerasimos Arsenis, who happened to also be of the same political party – that is, the governing party at the time, PASOK.
of Education\textsuperscript{47}, accompanied by sweeping changes within the Ministry of Education to political appointees, advisors, directors, and other staff. There seems to be a tradition in Greece that each new Minister must disregard the work of the previous Minister and start afresh – even if the new Minister happens to be from the same political party! It is in fact, a one-step forward, two-step backward, reform process.

Sadly, little, if anything, has changed in Greece in the last 15 years in terms of attitudes to change. This is not surprising since the status quo is a tightly-guarded sanctuary and the privilege of those ‘connected’ to the ruling party. Papandreou’s \textit{book of thoughts}, “The Tree and the Forest” (1996) is an admission of how the political system worked against progress in the decade 1985-1996; and which continued as such until the 2004 when PASOK lost the national elections. Some reflective quotes from Papandreou’s \textit{book of thoughts} which exemplify the extent of the Greek tragedy include:

“\ldots PASOK has shown to be unable to cut the Gordian Knot with the centralization, the clientelistic relationships and bureaucracy, those models that came to us from on the one hand from a dogmatic centralized communist party and form the other from the logic of a centralized nation with its clientelistic relationships” (p.18).

“We found ourselves incapable therefore and instead of changing these foundations of governance we used them. And these absorbed us and weakened us” (p. 19).

“Instead of freeing public strengths\ldots since 1985 we have enclosed the public within narrow political walls with biases and slogans, consolidating the immobility, the balances of indifference, the power relationships” (p. 20).

This acknowledgment by Papandreou is significant because this attitude and approach to politics and governance became entrenched in Greek society over the 20 years of

\textsuperscript{47} Kontogiannopoulos, 1990; Souflias, 1991; Fatouros, 1993; Papandreou, 1994; Arsenis, 1996; Eythimiou, 2000; Giannakou, 2004.
rule by PASOK from 1985 to 2004\textsuperscript{48}. Changing the \textit{status quo} in any way that risks upsetting \textit{loyalty networks} – especially in the area of higher education which forms the backbone of Greek society - is therefore, as difficult as moving a mountain. As Hall (1973) points out:

\textit{Meanings must be found in the context of hundreds of years of history…..diplomacy and political strategy can be seen as a kind of debate where the words cover years…..The language of politics and the language of culture are a long way apart, yet each subsumes the other.}\textsuperscript{(pp.99-100)}

One consequence of this need to maintain the status quo that serves as an added obstacle to achieving \textit{catharsis} within our \textit{Greek Tragedy} is what I shall call the “\textit{recycling of characters}” or the “\textit{familiar face syndrome}”. That is, the protagonists of our Tragedy – whether they be political protagonists (the decision-makers), or whether they be protagonists with a political voice (those that influence the decision-makers) are “recycled”\textsuperscript{49}. Of course, this “recycling” could be justified as “experience”; but does this otherwise value instrument ‘experience’ not serve to maintain the \textit{status quo} of loyalty networks? Can \textit{catharsis} be achieved if the characters maintain the plot of our \textit{Greek Tragedy}?

\section*{4. The Catharsis}

All good tragedies end with what is known as \textit{catharsis} or purification. In the Aristotelian sense, the purpose of \textit{catharsis} is to provide balance to the emotions raised during the tragedy, through meaning and understanding. Looking back then over our ‘Greek Tragedy’, one cannot help but wonder: \textbf{what is the meaning of the}

\textsuperscript{48} With a brief spell in opposition from 1990-1993.
\textsuperscript{49} If one looks at the names of the characters influencing policy and formulating policy, or in key positions (e.g. rectors of public universities; president of educational research institutes; directors of non-governmental educational bodies) over the past 15 years, it is immediately evident that it is the same pool of people being recycled with little, if any, new ‘blood’ being circulated within this tight network. Of course, since the re-election of the New Democracy (ND) party in 2004, ‘familiar faces’ from the period 1990-1993 (when ND ruled for a brief period) and the early 1980’s (when ND governed for a much longer period) have started to resurface.
higher education reform policy-process within the Greek context; why is the higher education reform policy-process within the Greek context so difficult; and how can the higher education reform policy-process within the Greek context be effectively implemented.

那里没有一门艺术比她的原则更腐朽，更被说教式的陈词滥调所充斥了，比政策学这门艺术更糟。

- John Milton

For any country, the implementation of significant policy change is challenging (Crosby, 1996), but for a country such as Greece with a very low expectation (Iwai, 1981) of the policy change process (and especially that of education, and even more, that of higher education), implementing major policy shifts poses special challenges. In such a case, the ability to understand and respond to the human dimension of change will ultimately be the determining factor in implementing and sustaining successful change (Farmer, 1990).

Change always carries with it a sense of violation. It thus invites resistance……Social organizations are by their nature conservative and protective. Social structures have been created to guard against disturbing changes (Farmer, 1990:7).

The inability to understand the way in which an organization’s culture will interact with various contemplated change strategies may therefore result in the failure of the strategies themselves. As Tierney (1988) notes: only when administrators possess a “full, nuanced understanding of the organization’s culture” can they communicate effectively with its different constituencies and cultivate their support, thereby

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51 According to Iwai (1981) after incorporating all the relevant information from the past into one’s subjective model of reality, an individual has no choice but to anticipate the future events by extrapolating the existing subjective model into the future. When an individual reaches “expectational equilibrium” there remains no incentive for the individual to change the existing routine pattern of forming expectations about the future. It seems that Greece has reached this level of “expectational equilibrium”.
52 Resistance to change is particularly intense in higher education because faculty members are instinctively hyper-conservative about educational matters (Farmer, 1990:7).
implementing decisions effectively (p.5). In other words, when dealing with human systems – and especially, complex human systems with deeply ingrained traditions and tempestuous personality traits (such as those possessed by – or possessing - the Greeks\(^{53}\)), it is not enough to try and enact change by simply re-stating ‘what is’\(^{54}\) in terms of ‘what should be’\(^{55}\) – as has been the case with regard higher education reform proposals in Greece up to now\(^{56}\).

*A system is a little black box, Of which we don’t unlock the locks,  
But find out what it’s all about, By what goes in and what comes out.*  
- System Engineer’s Anthem\(^{57}\)

If we use the ‘black box’ analogy of the system engineer it seems that policy-makers in Greece have been trying to control the outputs of the system from outside the ‘black box’ through the process of control by feedback (Romiszowski, 1981). They have spent their time building a shared vision of the future, but vision without *system analysis*\(^{58}\) ends up painting lovely pictures of the future with no deep understanding of the forces that must be mastered to move from here to there (Senge, 1990). Not surprisingly then, they have failed to achieve desired outputs - in this case *change*. But what are these *forces that must be mastered*?

It seems that the greatest obstacle to effecting reform in higher education in Greece is the cultural dimensions within which the policy-maker must operate. It would follow therefore, that if change is to be effected, either the cultural dimensions need to change (or be changed), or at least the policy-maker must *acknowledge* the

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\(^{53}\) Hall (1973) refers to these conditions as “the hidden rules that govern people” (p.32). “Culture”, he says, “controls behaviour in deep and persisting ways, many of which are outside of awareness and therefore beyond conscious control of the individual” (p.25).

\(^{54}\) The situation as we know it – in this case, the higher education system in Greece.

\(^{55}\) The situation as we would like it to be – in this case, the higher education system in Greece.

\(^{56}\) See pp. 18-19 of this paper.

\(^{57}\) Cited in Romiszowski, 1981 (p. 7).

\(^{58}\) That is, opening up the ‘black box’ or the system and looking *inside* in order to understand what makes the system work.
implications of these cultural dimensions within the change strategy. Setting out to change culture per se may of course be a disheartening challenge since it is doubtful that anyone ever really changes culture (Hall, 1973). However, as Hall (1973) notes:

If a person really wants to help introduce culture change he should find out what is happening on the informal level and pinpoint which informal adaptations seem to be the most successful in daily operations. Bring these to the level of awareness. Even this process can only accelerate change, not actually control it in the manner desired by men of action. This is because the out-of-awareness nature of the informal is where all changes start (p. 96).

Bringing the cultural dimensions to the level of awareness therefore, may indeed be a good place to start for the policy-maker in Greece, not only because policies are formed against the backdrop of the culture and as such can serve to reshape it, but perhaps more importantly, because the policy-maker does not stand apart from the people affected by his policies (Scheffler, 1985:117). Policy-making and reflexivity therefore, must go hand-in-hand. The following extract from Of Human Potential (Scheffler, 1985) nicely sums this up:

Understanding his own action in terms of his purposes and beliefs, his norms and the ideals he sets for himself; he seeks a parallel understanding of others……The policy-maker concerned to understand people, as indeed he must, needs thus to view them as subjects – active beings whose field of endeavour is structured by their own symbolic systems, their conceptions of world, self and community, their memories of the past, perceptions of the present and hopes for the future. Treating people as carbon copies of oneself, without taking the trouble to enter into their cultural environment, or – worse still – treating them as mere instrumentalities for, or hindrances to, the realization of a preconceived plan is a formula for policy failure…. They are to be seen not simply as comprising a field of application for policy, but as a resource for its origination and evaluation. This attitude takes their reaction not merely as promising facilitation or defeat of policy but as offering occasions for the review of policy. The policy-maker’s advance rationale is not sealed off from scrutiny by those, and communication with those for whom his policy is intended. His initial intentions are vulnerable to change, in principle, through interaction with the intentions of others (p. 102-103).

But I suppose, this is the stuff of good leadership – the “art of leadership” as Max DePree (1989) calls it and which encompasses “liberating people to do what is required of them in the most effective and humane way possible” (p.1).
The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader (p.11).

- DePree, 'Leadership is an Art' (1989)

Plato, in The Republic admits that only a tiny fraction of the population possessed the natural endowment which would make it possible to transform them into leaders – or what he called philosopher-kings, and later even dismissed this as an impossible dream. Perhaps this is an impossible dream as Plato would have us believe; perhaps not. What is certain, however, is that ineffective or ‘bad’ leadership does add to the burdens of strategic organizational change. Father Theodore Hesburgh, former President of Notre Dame University, once said:

The very essence of leadership is [that] you have to have a vision. It’s got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can’t blow an uncertain trumpet.

TIME, May 1987

It is precisely this “uncertain trumpet” that revealed the tragic flaw of the Minister of Education, Marietta Giannakou, when pressured by the student protests in June, she withdrew the draft higher education bill. I doubt that Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1983) would have considered her a “Change Master”.

In conceiving of a different future, change masters have to be historians as well. When innovators begin to define a project by reviewing the issues with people across areas, they are not only seeing what is possible, they may be learning more about the past; and one of the prime uses of the past is in the construction of a story that makes the future seem to grow naturally out of it in terms compatible with the organization’s culture.

The architecture of change thus requires an awareness of foundations – the bases in “prehistory,” perhaps below the surface, that make continued construction possible. And if the foundations will not support the weight of what is about to be built, then they must be shored up before any other actions can take place (p. 283).

- The Change Masters, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1983)

60 Change Masters according to Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1983) are: “Those people and organizations adept at the art of anticipating the need for, and of leading, productive change”.
If Giannakou had better prepared for leading the higher education reform process in Greece, would she have been driven to withdraw at the last minute the draft higher education bill? After all, the proposed draft higher education bill was supposedly in the making for over a year and had supposedly undergone, during this time, its *democratic* process of public dialogue! If the answer to the above question is *yes*\textsuperscript{61}, then does the *tragic flaw* lie in the democratic process?

Interestingly, when William Riker (1986), one of the most influential political scientists of the theory and practice of democracy, applied Kenneth Arrow’s (1950) impossibility theorem to politics, he found that democracy was chaotic, arbitrary, meaningless, and impossible. A less extreme view of democracy, but at the same time, questioning its implications, is that of Gauchet and Swain (1999), who in *Madness and Democracy* use, like Foucault (1967) before them, the history of innovations in the theory and treatment of mental illness, as an analogy for the meta-analysis of modern democratic society and the relationship between individuals and collective life on the one hand, and freedom and power on the other. Gauchet and Swain’s conceptual framework is influenced by the ideas of democracy espoused by Alexis de Tocqueville (1966), who accepts democratic society but worries deeply about its implications; Foucault’s by Friedrich Nietzsche (1967), who rejects it as a disguise for the rule of the weak. Nevertheless, both Gauchet and Swain, and Foucault, agree: what joins the history of insanity and its treatment to the history of politics and democracy is the question of human subjectivity. One of the central arguments moreover, that Gauchet and Swain share with Tocqueville is that:

\textsuperscript{61} That is: no matter how much Giannakou had prepared for leading reforms in higher education in Greece, she still would have been driven to withdraw at the last minute.
democratic ideas are risky, even dangerous ideas, opening the way to new and more insidious forms of domination…..The totalitarian potential in democratic culture is the other side of the autonomy it institutes, since the society that recognizes no powers outside itself is the one that allows nothing to stand between its organized common force and the lives of its members. Collective autonomy and individual vulnerability to social power are two sides of a single configuration. But the threat to freedom this poses is only realized where the power that stands for the whole aims to reduce individuals to a mass, effacing their differences in the name of some kind of pure sociality (p. xvii-xviii).

- Madness and Democracy

Although these interpretations of democracy may be considered as “erroneous” and “problematic” by some (for example, Mackie, 2003), perhaps there is (a little) room for such interpretations within the Greek context - even if they might be turning the father of democracy, Aristotle, over in his grave!

5. What next?

“…….given the circumstances of the parties, and their knowledge, beliefs, and interests, an agreement on these principles is the best way for each person to secure his ends in view of the alternatives available”

- Rawls, 1999 (p. 103)

Rawls may present a logical way forward for our Greek Tragedy, but it is unlikely to be the way forward. What lies ahead? Without doubt, more protests, more conflict, more turmoil, until exhaustion or some catastrophe naturally brings closure. The Plea of Nikos Maziotis (1998), a self-proclaimed anarchist, to the Athens Criminal Court is self-evident:

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63 Previous demonstrations about higher education reforms have resulted in loss of lives (e.g. in 1990-1991)
64 http://www.spiritoffreedom.org.uk/profiles/nikos.html
After that we have the students’ movement of "90-91 which was a grand one in my opinion. It managed to subvert the law of the Minister of Education Kontogiannopoulos, who finally resigned. The right-wing government, in its effort to repress the movement, had mobilized its thugs in order to smash the school occupations, resulting in the murder of a teacher, Nikos Temponeras, inside an occupied school in Patras. .........Responding to the murder of Temponeras there was a demonstration of thousands of people....... There were conflicts with the police, the Polytechnic was occupied once again for two days. Flames, barricades, damage.... There was also another crime those days, on the 10th of January "91. During the riots, tear-gas bombs thrown by the police caused a fire in the building of K. Marousi, a shopping-center on Panepistimiou street. Four people died there due to this fire. For this crime nobody has yet paid, nor did "justice" say anything. It was covered up.

- Nikos Maziotis (1998)

In seeking reflective equilibrium\textsuperscript{65} about the prospects for higher education reform in Greece, all I can do is hope. Like Martin Luther King, Jr., I too have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of\textsuperscript{66}..... democracy, of dialogue, of education ....as passed down to it by its ancestors.

\begin{quote}
“\textit{If a sound system of nurture and education is maintained, it produces men of a good disposition, and these, in their turn, taking advantage of such education, develop into better men than their forbears.}”
\end{quote}

-Plato, \textit{The Republic}

Perhaps, Plato in \textit{The Republic} did envisage a utopia where philosophers ruled, but the significance of his views on education, and especially university education, cannot be disregarded as utopian and are as contemporary today as they were then. Perhaps, our Greek tragedy is that we have not yet learnt to control our past - and until we control our past, we cannot control our future. As George Orwell once warned:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Whoever controls the past controls the future. Whoever controls the present controls the past.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{65} ‘Reflective equilibrium’ is the end-point of a deliberative process in which we reflect on and revise our beliefs about an area of inquiry, moral or non-moral. (Daniels, 2003).

\textsuperscript{66} From Martin Luther King Jr’s memorable 1963 speech to a civil rights march on Washington, DC.
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